

The aesthetics of ‘manhood’ within the paradigmatic framework of theopaschitic theology. From Brett Murray’s painting ‘The Spear’ and the opened fly to the iconic view of ‘The Anchor’ and the spiritual art of male genitals

ABSTRACT

The Brett Murray painting of president Zuma with an opened fly probes into the realm of manhood. It reveals the so called ‘masculinity crisis’ in the gender discourse. From a practical theological point of view it poses the question whether one can exclude male genitals from a holistic anthropology that views corporeality and sexuality as essential elements of the ‘human soul’. The following question is posed: To what extent can the theopaschitic paradigm and Christian iconic view on life contribute to the transformation of existing images on being male and masculinity? Can such a theological approach change existing paradigms determined by domination and patriarchal power? It is accepted that masculinities are products of social and cultural images. In this regard manhood is a social and cultural construct. The Brett Murray painting emphasizes the fact that the penis is still a phallic symbol and as a ‘public’ subjected to the gaze of social media. The public reactions on Brett Murray’s ‘The Spear’ are scrutinized by a Christian spiritual hermeneutics. The objective of the article is to emphasize the role of aesthetics in the establishment of a poetic gaze on manhood. It is an attempt to transform thrusting manhood into ‘compassionate intimacy’. It is argued that male genitals should be viewed as sacred and ‘souful’ parts of human embodiment.

Brett Murray’s painting of president Zuma, dressed in a suit, portrayed in the gesture of Lenin, with an opened fly and vivid manhood, stirred up a lot of reactions. The responses changes from laughing cynicism, to serious assessment, aesthetic evaluation, anger and even violent rejection. The point is, within processes of transformation, it reveals the “soul” of a very diverse South Africa. It unmask perceptions on political power. The painting uncovered the veins of masculinities in our society. It points in the direction of the realities of violence and the abuse of power, as well as deep seated ideas (ideologies) regarding race, sex, sexuality, gender, masculinity, femininity and the human body. To a certain extent one can say that the painting of Brett Murray cut into the nerves of the political dilemma in South Africa.

On the 22nd of May 2012 a red cross was sprayed over Zuma’s genitals. There was also an attempt to cover parts of the painting with black paint. Brett Murray’s art of resistance met resistance of art due to the blindfolded gaze of political imperialism.

According to Philda Essop (2012: 2) the core of the reaction from the side of the South African Communist Party was that the painting is offensive, disgusting and sadistic. It puts all black people in a negative perspective and fuels anew racism. “Only animals walk naked not human beings” (Essop 2012: 2).

The depiction of the genitals of a president is seen as disrespectful to the status of the presidency; it is actually ‘bad taste’, vulgar and touches on the borders of immorality and pornography.

Reactions from within the ANC pointed out that the depiction of Zuma's genitals is a subtle attack on the dignity and cultural values of black people. Gwede Mantashe, the secretary general of the ANC, is of opinion that the painting polarizes South Africans and suggests that black people have no morals (Van Rooyen 2012: 5). With reference to the fact that he had extra marital relationships, some others are of opinion that the president deserves the current criticism of his private sexual lifestyle. The criticism is not so much about the culture of polygamy, but about the president's personal lifestyle and his view on personal 'manhood'. The point is that Zuma's sexual behaviour effects the perception of males regarding the function of a penis and the meaning of masculinity; it reveals what one can call the current crisis of masculinity¹.

MANHOOD AND THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY AS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL QUESTION

In Habermas' terms² (Van der Ven 2002:21), three normative questions should be posed in practical theology.

- The first is the *teleological question* relating to our personal and communitarian life: who are we, what do we consider good, what do we strive for, what do we value?
- The second is a *deontological question* relating to our responsibility to each and everybody and to humankind as a whole: what is just, what is right, what are our obligations?
- The third is the *pragmatic or utilistic question*, relating to effectiveness and efficiency: which action will produce the intended result?

If one can assume that practical theology deals inter alia with the praxis of God within the public realm of life, in order to minister to the networking of human relationships, male identity from a Christian spiritual perspective becomes a practical theological issue. In order to foster human dignity and to enhance the quality and meaning of life, the current discussion on the Zuma painting, points in the direction of the teleological question: who we are as males? It brings the deontological question into the gender discourse: what is our obligation as males if manhood is an essential element of our being human? We cannot avoid the question: which action and *habitus* can change existing paradigms on manhood mainly instigated by brute patriarchalism?

Horrocks³ refers to the crisis of masculinity when he points out that males feel powerless in our contemporary society and are pressurized to conform to a kind of hegemonic masculinity⁴. (the athletic male body as a mark of power and moral superiority⁵). Under the pressure of the gender debate, and the demand to come in contact with their feminine side, men are becoming more and more uncertain of themselves (Mowrey 1996). They often escape in a very artificial mode of being. Even tend to behave more violently in their attempt to destroy their vulnerable

1 Without any doubt, within a global society and without a fixed role description, being a male has become extremely difficult. In terms of the gender discourse male violence and the abuse of power have become burning issues. Even for the church and communities of faith. "Some of the distortions about male violence come because of the church's confusion about power and sexuality (Poling 2003: 31).

2 On the implication of Habermas' perspectives on practical theology and theory formation, see De Roest 1998; on the normative perspectives of practical theology, 269-353.

3 R. Horrocks, *Masculinity in Crisis. Myths, Fantasies and Realities* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), p. 143. See also A. Clare, *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000).

4 According to T. Carrigan, (2004: 151-165) the differentiation of masculinities is psychological, but also institutional and an aspect of collective practice. Hegemonic masculinity is to impose a particular definition on other kinds of masculinity (154). On hegemonic masculinity see also N. Edley, M. Wetherall (1995: p. 129).

5 M.L. Stemmelet (1996: 95) calls the phenomenon of homosexuality a "gemixtepickel" including such prejudiced terms as faggots, dykes and fairies.

side and sensitivity. Within poor communities, due to unemployment and disrupted social structures, they become desperate.

The fact is that the male penis has become a public idol and a 'bone of contention'. Since ancient times the phallic symbol was an icon for manhood and stirred up a lot of reactions.

The painting depicts 'manhood' as a 'spear'. Manhood is then refers to virility, egoistic and self-satisfying male pride. Male sexuality is about powerful domination (Bourdieu 2001). Within the context of patriarchalism, manhood is closely related to the thrusting, penetrating event whereby women are subjugated to a kind of fascistic and even violent abuse of authority. The penis operates like a spear that can 'kill', destroy and afflict pain and suffering.

Murray's own explanation is that the painting is a parody on a Russian propaganda poster by Viktor Iwanof. The intention is to fool with political power and patriarchy (Van Rooyen 2012: 5).

The fact that Zuma is dressed in the clothes of Lenin, as well as his imperialistic posture representing powerful authority, needs the thorough attention of a theological anthropology. The debate in the social media focused mostly on the open fly. However, the main question should not so much be about the immorality of the painting, but on the morality of the person. To my mind the painting focuses on the qualitative question regarding ethos: What is hidden behind the clothes, i.e. the intention and attitude regarding masculinity? At stake in the quest for manhood is actually the significance of the male body (Driver 1996).

My contention is that 'the spear' refers to ethos and implies more than merely nakedness and genitals. The reference to the 'spear' is fundamentally an ethos (*habitus*) –question; i.e. a spiritual question; the question about the meaning and purposefulness of manhood.

SPIRITUAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE "SOCRATIC VIEW ON LIFE"

Socrates wanted to penetrate the physical world by means of the notion of the goodness, the inherent beauty that contributed to the fact that things are as they are. In spite of a scientific explanation, he opted for an aesthetic gaze. "He is looking for explanations in terms of some ultimate Goodness which forms everything, including us, and draws us to it by means of spiritual knowledge and desire. We must consider not the things which Anaxagoras and the scientists speak of, but the real, ultimate causes of Beauty, Goodness, Magnitude, and so on, which the good and beautiful things and the quantities of things on earth participate in and reflect" (O'Hear 2007: 108).

To see "goodness" and "beauty" one needs the iconic gaze of wisdom: what really counts in life and why is life valuable, even the penis of a male?

My basic assumption is: Life in itself is iconic –the whole of life, every aspect of our being human (including the genitals) is sacred and 'spiritual' and can be viewed as a piece of art. To live is to detect the artistic fibre of the whole of creation.

Actually, creation from the Latin *creare*, is an artistic endeavour and refers to the artistic challenge to rename the whole of creation; to discover or to decode its significance. At stake in the Genesis narrative, more than the factuality or 'history' of creation, is the fact that God created against the nothingness of darkness and chaos, some-"thing", namely life as it emanates from the living God. Over against the harshness and anxiety of darkness, life becomes beautiful, framed by covenantal grace. Creation is fundamentally about theological aesthetics: the value and beauty of life.

Life in its iconic form is an illustration of beauty. More fundamental than the quest for ethics, the moral discernment between right and wrong, are the quest for aesthetics, the recognition and awareness of *shalom* and beauty. To detect morality, one must first discover aesthetics.

Responsible decision-making is determined by iconic seeing⁶. Icons make morals transparent and norms hopeful suggestions for the transformation and healing of life.

An iconic view anticipates something new; it instils hope; it beautifies life; it inspires creative thinking; it encourages faithful vision⁷; it sanctifies corporeality; it fuels artistic imagination; it even criticizes and unmask the immorality of destructive behaviour and deceitful intentions.

THE HUMAN BEING AS *HOMO AESTHETICUS*: THE TRUTH AND BEAUTY⁸ OF THE ZUMA PAINTING

“Man is *homo festivus* and *fantasia homo*” (Cox 1969: 11). With reference to an iconic view one can add: man is essentially a *homo aestheticus*. The human being as *homo aestheticus* refers to visionary anticipation and artistic appreciation within the quest for meaning and the creative attempt to signify and decode the markings or signs of life (Eco 2004). Signs can be called the semiotics of the arts⁹ (Hess-Lüttich, Rellstab 2010: 247); signs signify “something”. Whether the something is a concrete object or the product of impression or imagination, a piece of art refers in one way or another to an “idea” as related to context, form and content (Belton et al 2006: 11-13).

In 1992 Ellen Dissanyake wrote a book with the title: *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art comes from and Why*. Her basic assumption was that art can be regarded as a natural general proclivity that manifests itself in culturally learned specifics such as dances, songs, performances, visual display and poetic speech. Art makes life special because art making involves taking something out of its everyday and ordinary use context and making it somehow special – the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

Matzker Reiner (2008) relates aesthetics¹⁰ to the act of mediation within the tension

6 In his book *Seeing Things*, Stephen Pattison sums up the predicament of people living in an age of what might be characterized as ‘visual overload’ or hyper-visibility: “we have so much, but see so little” (Pattison 2007: 1). We are living in a visual culture overloaded by images. Images rain upon us in all spheres of life. “With the extension of sight by microscopic, telescopic, electronic, digital and other means symbolized by instruments such as electron microscopes, scanners, cameras and photographs, we are all too aware of living in a world structures round sight and the visual” (Pattison 2007: 3).

Viewing within the critical rationalism and positivism of Western thinking has become arrogant. Pattison refers to this arrogance as the ‘scopic regime of the arrogant eye’ (2007: 19). In contemporary society there is a kind of ‘ordinary blindness’ that ignores the realm of vision. Sometimes we see, but we don’t ‘see’ in seeing the unseen. For this kind of seeing, human beings should develop a more intimate relationship with images and artefacts.

7 On his definition of faith (seeing the invisible) Martin Luther once commented as follows: the characteristics of faith are to see what nobody sees, and not to see what everybody sees (Laubach 1967:241).

8 According to Thomas Aquinas integrity (*integritas*), harmony (*consonantia*) and clarity (*claritas*) can be described as the principles of beauty. They can also be interpreted as wholeness, proportion and luminosity (Skawran 2012: 3). The poetic question and the quest for beauty kindles quest for congruency between viewer and an object. Within this dynamics, aesthetics can be described as the attempt to move images and objects into the realm of imagination (Botha 2012: 5).

9 In the book *Wie Kunst die Welt erschuf* Nigel Spivey (2006: 14) asserts that art is not merely the ability to craft (*Handwerkliches Können*); not merely the endeavour to beautify. Art emerges from the dynamics between human’s creative ability and imagination/fantasy. The explosion of creativity in art is a mode of signifying life (Spivey 2006: 24).

10 According to Jochen Schulte-Susse (2010: 758-778) aesthetics should be linked to theory on perspective (perspectivism). The theory of perspective is about the question how to resemble a three dimensional object on a two dimensional surface, or how to represent a three dimensional object via a material form

between subject (impression and interpretation) and object or the implicit idea as related to an object or something perceived and observed. To mediate is always a sign for something (2008:10). Mediation operates within the connections between form (*eidōs*; essence, meaning) and matter (*hýle*, ontic dimension). The projection of what is observed and seen implies in the act of mediation and representation virtuosity: skill, competence and know-how; i.e. artistic proficiency.

The mediatory function of a medium is to communicate, to inform, to disclose, and to make something knowable. Aesthetics becomes an instrument (medium), an image¹¹ (means) about some-*thing* (content). It transcends its own limitations in the direction of signification. In this regard aesthetics symbolizes (from the Greek *syμβάlein* = to link to halves) and refers to meaning. (Matzker 2008:10). Aesthetics then expands the interpretation horizon of human beings; it creates a grammar of mediation. For Plato the mediation points in the direction of a copy of a kind of original image or existing idea. For Aristotle the mediation is in itself a process of signifying in the sense that it functions as a memory (*Anamnese*) to reality (Matzker 2008:11-12).

The Greek Polyclitus and the school of the Pythagoreans (In Hess-Lüttich, Rellstab 2010: 247) called a piece of art the attempt to express perfect interrelatedness of different components to one another; it wants to explain how the different parts are related to the whole. Art is therefore involved in the human attempt to express a kind of order (relationship) (truth) despite the chaotic appearances of threatening phenomena.

Art is a kind of *aletheia* (truth); literally to take off the lid from the steam cooker, to look deeper into the cooking pot. Truth indicates a kind of revelation – to peep deeper into the unseen. Truth decompresses and unmask life; it saves life from artificiality (kitsch); it frees human beings from sloth. Truth brings about integrity and understanding; it is kind of existential understanding – an aesthetic hermeneutics even if the truth is 'ugly'.

With reference to the attempt in an aesthetic hermeneutics to deal with truth and to signify life, one can categorize the Brett Murray painting as an aesthetic event of truth. The painting is therefore 'beautiful'. It is actually an attempt to "free" manhood from the violent and ugly abuse of power in order to signify life and to depict the male body within the framework of aesthetics¹².

From the viewpoint of political power and the ANC organization, the depiction is immoral and vulgar. It should be removed and forbidden. It is an attack on the status of presidency. On the other hand, from the perspective of aesthetics, the painting unmasks immoral behaviour and is an endeavour to heal life and to free people from the abuse of power and violence. It is not vulgar, but "beautiful".

In his *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Picasso reveals a kind of barbaric destructiveness that

or sculpture so that the representation and image of the object, the idea within the object, corresponds with the proportions of the immediacy of the act of seeing, feeling and experiencing. In terms of Jacob Boehm's theory on aesthetics, aesthetics links with the intention and value assessment of the subject in relationship with the viewed or observed object.

11 One can even say: imaging is an existential ingredient of life. It seems that at our center there is a "will to image"; an urge for creative imagination "that explains the apparent universality of art-making – of sensory and sensual creativity – in human history" (Stone 2003: 5). It is as if in an Augustine's sense, life is sacramental. To live is to create a work of art to the degree that it makes visible the invisible – "the unseeable and yet sensed, the unknowable and yet longed for: the mystery" (Stone 2003: 9).

Pablo Picasso once said: "God is nothing else than an artist. He imaged the giraffe, an elephant and the cat. Actually God does not have a style; He always invents something new" (Picasso 1988: 75; my translation).

12 According to Picasso: "The painter takes whatever it is and destroys it. At the same time he gives it another life" (In: Huffington 1988: 118).

horrified his friends and the art society: "...five horrifying women, prostitutes who repel rather than attract and whose faces are primitive masks that challenge not only society but humanity" (Huffington 1988: 93). Huffington therefore concludes that while Matisse pursued serenity in life, Picasso was a seismograph for the conflicts, turmoil, doubts and anxieties of his age. He was driven by all-consuming urge to challenge, to shock, to destroy and remake the world (Huffington 1988: 85)¹³.

The beauty therefore of Brett Murray's painting resides in the fact that it reveals and makes apparent; even the ugliness of our being human. It puts the notion of manhood and the iconic value of the male genitals in the spotlight of a public debate with the question: What is the significance of a penis within the framework of human embodiment and the dynamics of human relationships? Should it destroy or should it display faithful intimacy? The fact is that besides his polygamous marriage (which is not the crucial issue in the discourse) children were procreated out of wedlock.

The painting actually deals with what can call an *aesthetic truth*. In the formation of the object (*Gestaltung*), the correlation between image (idea) and essence (*eidos*) (the transcendent *telos*) creates a kind of aesthetic truth (A. G Baumgarten in Matzker 2008: 44-45). Aesthetic truth is then a kind of authenticity and integrity in opposition to falseness and artificiality (*Kitsch*).

As an icon of human wholeness the painting opposes falseness and embodied '*Kitsch*'. In terms of an iconic view the depiction of the genitals within the framework of a clothed body, penetrates the realm of the whole of our being human. As an icon it points in the direction of the 'soulfulness of life'; it addresses the spiritual question whether the genitals are 'dirty', 'vulgar' and 'private', or 'beautiful', 'sacred' and 'public'.

TOWARDS THE AESTHETICS OF MANHOOD: THE MALE PENIS AS AN *EIKON* AND ANCHOR OF COMPASSIONATE INTIMACY

In Western Christian doctrine we have placed an enormous emphasis on justification and the notion of human beings as sinners. We have also placed an enormous emphasis on a human being as worker (Luther and Marx) and a human being as thinker (Aquinas, Descartes and orthodox doctrine). We sanctified the mind as the faculty of soulfulness excluded and deprived of any form of embodiment. Our celebrative and imaginative faculties have atrophied (Cox 1969: 11). One can even add: our aesthetic and imaginative faculties have mummified under the pressure of the sinfulness of embodiment. The body is dirty and the soul is pure.

The portrayal of the divine in terms of a human figure was therefore always a disputable issue. Michelangelo made a kind of "breakthrough" in the sense that he viewed the perfect human figure as a representation of God (divine embodiment) or Christ not as a "graven image" to be worshipped (idolatry) but as a depiction of the beauty of God (God's love) as reflected in the essence of the human soul. At the same time, the movement and proportions of the human body are always framed by torment and suffering.

13 In an interview in *Die Burger* (La Vita 2012: 13) the South African sculptor Dylan Lewis referred to this intra-psyche transcendence as an "inner wilderness". This inner wilderness is for him the human psyche in its wild freedom as exposed to the dark shadow side of our human existence. It refers to the inner quest for integration and self-acceptance. In his art he is challenged by that inner urge to destroy, the fear for evil and the attempt to transcend the wild inner shadows by artistic creativity. In a recent piece of sculpture ('Rooiplein' Matieland, Stellenbosch) with the title Male Trans-Figure I and II, the naked male image with an animal mask, points to the shadow side of being male. The mask functions as kind of image to fuel a confrontation with the inner reality of dark wilderness. The image of an animal mask helps him to reveal both an inner as well as an outer awareness of destruction. At the same time it reveals one's inner truth and becomes a vehicle to tame the inner self, the polarity between the wild animal and the dignified human being.

The meaning of the Last Judgment resides not in the naked bodies but “the shop wreck of entire tormented and suffering humanity...anxiously awaiting the fulfilment of the promise that in the presence of Christ the Judge and Redeemer the righteous will rise from the dead at the end of time” (Vecchi in: Paris 2009: 175).

From Socrates Michelangelo learned that the purpose of painting was to present the human soul, the life of human souls, as an expression of the very internal being of humans. According to Néret (2006: 32) Michelangelo was only interested in the people he painted due to the fact that perfect bodies were the carriers and containers of the idea of eternity.

K Schoeman in his book on Michelangelo Buonarroti (2009:555) refers to the fact that in his reflection on life and its purpose, it was all about the attempt how to bridge the gap between God and human beings by means of the aesthetics of beauty, the expression of love and the imaging of art. The beauty of the cosmic body within its imperfect earthly realm as well as the attempt to depict it in painting and sculpturing serve as a vehicle to glorify God.

For Michelangelo imaging in art is iconic because it is helping him to approach the perfect beauty of God (Schoeman 2009: 559). To capture human embodiment, to see a naked human body, is to capture the ensoulment of life and to see the aesthetics of God.

The naked human body: pornographic striptease or aesthetic embodiment of the human soul?

If one renders the human body as an icon of the human soul, the portrayal of the naked human body should be deprived from its association with pornography and promiscuity. Within an iconography of the human soul, nakedness reflects harmony and interconnectedness. Two breasts for a woman and one penis for a male depict perfect form and symmetry.

Within Greek art the naked human body and its perfect symmetry equals beauty and should be assessed as a piece of art. Spivey (2006: 75) refers to the canonization of human embodiment in art by Polyclitus. For Polykleitos the human body is from an aesthetic point of view perfect due to the tension between symmetry, balance and harmony. Within a poetic gaze the naked human body therefore reflects dynamics, balance and harmony not pornography.

Pornography is derived from two Greek words, *pornay* and *graphay* (Melton *et al.* 1989:68). *Pornay* is derived from *peraymi* which means “to sell,” usually in reference to a slave or prostitute for hire. *Graphay* refers to that which is written, inscribed, or pictured. “Pornography” then literally means to picture or describe prostitutes, with the connotation of an unequal slave/master relationship.

Pornography is therefore not nakedness as such (see the statue of David by Michelangelo and the paintings in the Sistine Chapel), or explicit sexual pictures or portrayals of sexual acts, or erotic material, stimulating sexual excitement. The criterion cannot be sexual excitement or fantasy, because then any stimulation or visual impression related to sexual connotations and to sex will fall under the category of pornography.

Pornography refers very specifically to *sexual exploitation and the dehumanisation of sex* so that human beings are treated as things or commodities (Court 1990:929). Pornography points in the direction of the depiction or the description of the unequal misuse of power and violent sexuality (physical and psychological violence against others and oneself) promoting promiscuity. The genitals then become playful tools (the instrumentalisation of physiology) not intimate icons representing .

Brett Murray: not ‘trouser painter’ but ‘soul painter’?

During Pius V’s pontificate, the Congregation of the Council of Trent decided, on January 11th, 1564, to have the private parts cover. The most pornographic decision in the history of Christian

spirituality! Pope Paul IV therefore summoned the House of Carafa Daniele da Volterra to cover the genitals. The artist who did the covering was given the name “Braghettone” meaning “trouser painter” (Néret 2006:78).

The notion that embodied beauty as a soulful representation and image of the beauty of God should be rendered as a “postmodern step” to move from a dualistic anthropology, with its off spin the degradation of the naked human body to the realm of promiscuity and pornography, to an integral anthropology with its off spin the aesthetics of the naked human body.

The notion that the beauty of human corporality embodies the aesthetics of the human soul (Néret 2006:16); the human body as the anatomy of the human soul, should be rendered as a deconstruction of the pagan thinking in Christian anthropology that physicality and corporality is less spiritual and from a lower order than the transcendent position of an “immortal soul”.

The advantage of the Michelangelonian transformation is the paradigm shift from the hedonistic perspective of promiscuity to the aesthetic perspective of beauty; from the performance of sexuality to the enjoyment of sexuality; from phallus to *eikon*. In fact the human body and the genitals are not designed to destroy and to ruin, but to heal and to beautify.

Manhood: fascinated by phallus¹⁴

Bordo (1999: 43) refers to the link between the phallic god Fascinus, worshipped by the Romans, and the *fascinum* attached to the worship of the phallus as a magical being. Phallus is the penis that takes one’s breath away because of its majesty; projecting generic male superiority, the phallus is an idea and not merely a body part.

Phallus is related to male affirmation and libido. Monick(19987:9) sees in the phallic symbol¹⁵ of the erect penis the archetypal masculinity and the fundamental mark of maleness; it represents subjective authority and powerful penetration. The penis is the source of a man’s greatest vulnerability as well as his greatest feeling of power (Horrocks 1994: 16-20).

Within the culture of patriarchy the phallus¹⁶ has been used as synecdoche for the whole representation of manhood. It could indeed be argued that the contemporary fascination with the male body has become phallic again. Derived from the Latin, *fascinum*, a phallic-shaped amulet, the emphasis is on control and youth. Phallicism indicates the bigness of the body and reduces manhood and masculinity to the area of the genitals.

The phallic symbol¹⁷ is closely connected to procreation, (fertility) and erection. The display of the phallus leads in our culture to the consumerism of male sexuality (Kibby et al 2004: 214 227). The possession and display of a large penis has become a sign of masculinity in good working order. It leads to phallus mastery, as the concentration on the erect penis projects an image of the male body as a hard body. This image is reinforced by Viagra as the potency pill that works like a magic bullet as it can produce rampant erections. Masculinity becomes the erect male organ and is therefore connected to the impulse to control

14 At stake is the question whether the HIV & AIDS pandemic, with the emphasis on circumcision and condomising, is not reintroducing the powerful image of the erect male organ now in the disguise of a rubberised tool?

15 The phallic is the totalizing/singularizing, that-which-can-dominate, oversee; the male gaze is that of the possessor. W. G. Doty (1996: p. 299).

16 “The phallus, the prized male erection, is taken as the quintessential symbol of manliness and the idealized phallus is big, hard, and up.” J. B. Nelson (1996: p. 315). Humans have also emphasised those qualities in the divine. God, too, must be “big, hard, and up”: sovereign in power, righteous in judgment, and transcendent.

17 In religion the phallic symbol played an important part in cultic worship. Eilberg Schwartz (1994: p. 41). Schwartz refers to the Greek gods Poseidon, Apollo and Zeus, who were frequently sculpted in Greek art with their penises fully displayed. The divine phallus is also evident in ancient Near Eastern mythology.

Bordo (1999: 32-44) argues that in our culture the penis has come out of closet. Underwear advertisements exploit the impact of the phallic mythology of *Superman Masculinity* as a vital image in our culture: the cultural equation of penis = male; the “proud member” and “throbbing manhood”. Non-erect, the penis suggests vulnerability and fragility. Viagra-erection projects male vitality, virility and potency.

This urge is symbolised by the connectedness between the male organ (penis)¹⁸ and its function: penetration. The other is then the object to be penetrated and to be conquered. The act of penetration is closely related to an approach to persuade and to overwhelm. In this regard masculinity is linked to a hormonal state and the levels of testosterone in males. Some researchers link this approach to a tendency in males to be more aggressive than females.

Masculinity became narcissistic and self-referential. In the church this image is enforced by a God-image that is predominantly male and all-powerful.

Related to power and impression is the so-called macho male. It refers to strength, virility, masculinity and sex appeal (Mirandé 2004: 29).

The macho traits can either be positive (brave, courageous, altruistic, protective, androgynous) or negative (bravado, selfish, pretentious, boastful, abusive, chauvinistic).

Threat power is also closely related to patriarchy¹⁹ and the cultural traditions of tribalism. Within the gender debate the paradigm of patriarchy²⁰ is related to a hierarchical understanding of human value and identity.

Male sexuality becomes the technique of “seizure”. In the quest for performance, the body image plays a fundamental role. The media and cinema have reinforced this image. Through Hollywood the action film has played an enormous role in linking masculinity and sexuality to performance. For example, Stallone and Schwarzenegger, the muscular stars of the 1980s, projected the notion of manhood as “performing the masculine” (Tasker 1993: 230-244).

The muscular male body (the Rambo image) functions as a powerful symbol of desire, “heroism as a costume” (Tasker 1993: 242). The male body becomes a tissue with well-developed muscles. In this regard the media play a decisive role: “We are beginning to see human life as a lump of protein” (Panghorn 1985: 214).

The danger in these male gender symbols is their potential for engendering violence. The effect of the symbols on male sexual behaviour is that they feed aggressive behaviour, often expressed in violent actions. For example, in the case of rape and sexual abuse male dominance plays a decisive role. The alarming statement has even been made that the “male sex” requires injustice in order to exist.²¹ Masculinity becomes roughness and toughness²².

18 It is Haldeman’s contention that touching of the penis and masturbation can, at least, serve to put men back in touch with themselves. The renewal of a man’s relationship with his body is related to, and a part of a man’s image of his sexuality. Men think of their penis as the definitive sign of their identity as men.

S. Haldeman (1996: 111-115).

19 Nyokabi Kamau makes the important remark: patriarchy is ever-present. Every aspect of life is governed by deeply rooted patriarchal power structures and practices that express the strong entrenchment of male superiority and domination over women. N. Kamau (2009: Vii).

20 It is the contention of many researchers on gender issues and on counselling males that caregivers should be able to understand the dynamics of patriarchy and its contradictory messages for men’s lives and be able to help men sort out what is true and faithful for their lives in community. C. C. Neuger, J. N. Poling (Nashville: Abingdon (1997: 32-45).

21 See in this regard L. Du Toit, (2003: 36-67). It is clear that rape refers to irresponsible male behaviour. It includes torture. “I came to the conclusion that rape is first and foremost an assertion of power through an act of supreme humiliation” (p.36). Rape is sexual terrorism (p. 49).

22 It is therefore quite understandable that Du Toit, *Rape Understood as Torture: What is the Responsibility of Men?* (2003: 64) concludes that men must refuse to be men in as far as the popular conception of

The previous exposition of how maleness is portrayed in the media and our culture of playboy and playgirl, should be viewed as the paradigmatic background for the aesthetic hermeneutics of the Zuma painting. If the painting addresses the naive toughness of powerful playboys, the spiritual question, emanating from an iconic and poetic view of life, is: How can a Christian spiritual perspective on manhood contribute to a possible paradigm change from the instrumentalisation of the genitals to a possible sanctification of the genitals?

Aesthetic masculinity as embodied intimacy: the sanctification of the male genitals

From the perspective of a Christian spiritual approach the challenge put by the crisis of male identity and the Murray painting is the question whether the male body can become “ensouled embodiment”? Ensoulment is an attempt to integrate the spiritual dimension of our being human (Dalbey 1988) with our being in the flesh (*sarx*) and the physical reality of human embodiment (*sōma*).

Dunn (1998: 56) suggests that a better word in English for *soma* (body) is the alternative term “embodiment”. In this sense *sōma* is a relational concept. It is integrated with psyche. According to Dunn (1998: 77) both terms (*psyche/nepesh* and *pneuma/ruach*) express an original identification of “breath” as life force which cannot be separated from embodiment. Together with *sarx* (which refers to our vulnerability/weakness and belonging to the world) and *sōma* (which denotes a concrete being in the world), *psyche* denotes the spiritual totality of our being human within the dynamics of relationships. The human body is actually a religious phenomenon; a sanctuary to display the vivid presence of God within relationships.

Within a Christian spirituality of embodiment, is it possible to embrace eros?²³ Can theology accommodate and even assimilate *eros*²⁴ – the dimension of sexual need, desire, passion and sensuality – and therefore translate bodyism into spiritual corporeality²⁵?

Theopaschitic theology and the paradigmatic shift towards compassionate intimacy

It is my contention that *compassionate intimacy* can help the gender discourse to find the solution for the “healing” of the paradigmatic issue of masculinity not only on the level of *ethics* (gender equality, human dignity, human rights, ego integrity and authenticity), but also on the level of *aesthetics*: the beauty of embodiment and genital, erotic sensuality due to the fact that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit: *pneumatological inhabitation*. In this regard the human genitals become sacred instruments of life. They are symbols of hope and, as ‘anchors’ of the human soul, spiritual instruments to establish human dignity. Within an iconic and poetic gaze they are not perverse instruments designed for promiscuity.

Compassionate intimacy implies a paradigm shift in theology. The switch is from categories in theology that emphasize the power of God in terms of ‘threat power’, to categories that portray God not in Caesar-like imperialistic paradigms, but in theopaschitic categories of compassion

masculinity views this as enforcing one’s will against opposition.

23 According to J. B. Nelson, (1996: 311-31), “real men” prize sex, but find *eros* foreign.

24 Nelson’s plea is for an erotic transformation of men’s bodies (1996: 313 -314). Men’s bodies are not fated to be controlling, violent, radically individualised, and preoccupied with phallic values, racist, armored, mechanistic, or disconnected from close male friendship. Men’s bodies can, indeed, become more fulfilling and life giving to themselves and to others.

25 The popular film industry and cinema function as a kind of production of myth. J. Hermann (2002: 93). Because of its simulation of reality, Hollywood functions as a dream factory (*Traumfabrik*) trying to capture and hijack the fantasies of men and women (pp. 132-133) in their search for a sense of being at home. In this regard the concreteness of the human body and the “religion of love” are introduced as vehicles and instruments to convey happiness and meaning. For example, in the film *Pretty Woman* love is introduced as a mean to an end, i.e. to save (to heal) a prostitute from decadence and loneliness.

and vulnerability. Males should therefore start to identify not with patriarchal and hierarchical God-images, but with passionate God-images. In this regard, God as a compassionate Partner for Life can play a decisive role in the shift from powerful manhood into compassionate manhood.

The value of theopaschitic thinking (the notion of a suffering, vulnerable, weak and passionate God in terms of a *theologia crucis*) for the praxis of God, is the following: it proposes a shift from the substantial approach in theological reflection to the relational and encounter paradigm (Berkhof 1979: 32-33). The switch is then from the attempt of orthodoxy to uphold ecclesial triumphalism (Hall 1993:100-101) and a theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*) and omnipotence (powerful force)²⁶, to a *theologia crucis*²⁷ of weakness, suffering and passion.

It is my contention that the *passio dei* is an exposition of the praxis concept of *ta splanchna*. The latter is related to the Hebrew root *rhm*, to have compassion. It is used in close connection to the root *hnn*, which means to be gracious. Together with *oiktirmos* and *hesed*, it expresses the being quality of God as connected to human vulnerability and suffering (H.-H. Esser 1976:598). The verb *splanchnizomai* is used to make the unbounded mercy of God visible; it displays a strange kind of divine Beauty. It describes a theological aesthetics. In a theological aesthetics, beauty should therefore be connected to the pathos of the crucifixion. "This *em-pathos*, mediated by their own distinct accounts through the beauty of the crucifix, in turn becomes, second, sym-pathos – a plea for divine sympathy with their own suffering" (Garcia-Rivera 2008: 177).

*Ta splanchna*²⁸ reveals God as a Presence, "a Companion, 'your God' " (Hall 1993:147). In praxis-thinking it is not the task of the church to demonstrate that God must *be*, but to bear witness to God's being-there, being-with, and being- for the creature. In terms of D Hall (1993:155) the test of the church's God-talk at any point in time is its contextual authenticity, its praxis-thinking: does it illuminate God's being-with-us? We can add: does it portray God's being-with-us as *ta splanchna*²⁹?

Splanchnizomai reveals the very character of God within the messianic involvement and engagement with human suffering. The theology of the entrails³⁰ reflects God's being quality, and can be called the ontology of God's beauty in suffering.

26 See in this regard the remark of Hall (1993:108): "Powerful people demand powerful deities – and get them!"; "Power – and precisely power understood in the usual sense – is of the essence of divinity shaped by empire" (1993:107).

27 "Greek epistemology could not take account of the surprise needed to recognize God on the cross ...It did not envision suffering as a source of knowledge". Jon Sobrino in Hall 1993: note 8, p105.

28 It is interesting to note the cases where Christ responded to human suffering with the contraction of the entrails, expressing messianic compassion. For example the leper with his petition (Mk.1:41), the people like sheep without a shepherd (Mk. 6:34); Matt.9:36: the sight of the harassed and exhausted crowd; Matt. 20:34: two blind men who besought him; Lk. 7:13: the widow at Nain mourning her only son. In Lk. 15:11-32, the prodigal son, *splanchnizomai* expresses the strongest feeling of a merciful and loving reaction (verse 20). In the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:33) *splanchnizomai* expresses the attitude of complete willingness to use all means, time, strength, and life, for saving at the crucial moment (Esser 1976: 600).

29 In general Greek *to splanchnon* refers to the valuable parts, the heart, lung, liver, but also the spleen and the kidneys. During the sacrifice they are removed for the sacrificial meal. With reference to human *splanchna* refers to the human entrails, especially for the male sexual organs and the womb, as the site of the powers of conception and birth. Within metaphoric speech *ta splanchna* expresses pity, compassion and love. "The oldest form of the verb is *splanchnneuō*, eat the entrails, prophesy from the entrails" (H.-H. Esser 1976:599). Within the messianic context of Christ's salvific mission, *ta splanchna* expresses compassion as an indication of God's divine involvement with the human predicament of suffering.

30 Noteworthy is the fact that within these texts *ta splanchna* is connected to illness and health; dying and mourning; loss and grief; violence and injustice; burnt out and hunger, estrangement and remorse.

CONCLUSION

Compassionate intimacy should embody God's beauty in suffering as vulnerable co-suffering. This image should enhance humane authenticity. It should display compassionate friendship as well as the ethics of unconditional love. It is an attempt to emphasise and introduce images of the wounded healer, companionship, trustful partnership, mediator, colleague, and nurturer to male identity in order to merge male sexuality and the phallic male organ with the promotion of theopaschitic intimacy: compassionate and sacrificial love and grace.

Ethics without aesthetics leads to fanaticism, legalism and moralism. Between the either or of "white" and "black", life becomes a nightmare of principles.

Aesthetics without ethics leads to chaos and anarchy. Between the either or of beauty and ugliness, life becomes a labyrinth of multiple choices and options: the confusion of everything goes.

The interplay between aesthetics and ethics open ups the splendid and colourful kaleidoscope of meaning, as well as the dazzling spectrum of opportunities. But then, in terms of the question of the art of life, the aesthetics of being, beauty is more fundamental than morality. It is more fundamental not in terms of priority, but in terms of significance: the heuristic and artistic endeavour to decode and to detect the "design" of signs. Thus the significance of spiritual art and the importance of an iconic view on life.

Christian spirituality needs the artistic gaze of iconic viewing. As said: art makes life special because art making involves taking something out of its everyday and ordinary use context and making it somehow special – the ordinary becomes extraordinary. This is what the Brett Murray painting is doing.

An iconic view on the aesthetics of manhood should change the erotic gaze of 'The Spear' (thrusting penetration) eventually into the intimate gaze of 'The Anchor' (compassionate faithfulness). Manhood is then transformed from dominating 'thrust' into hopeful empowerment; it becomes an instrument for the fostering of human dignity (an anchor of hope) not for violent exploitation (a destructive spear).

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Prof Daniël Louw
 Faculty of Theology
 171 DorpStreet
 Stellenbosch 7600
 South Africa
 djl@sun.ac.za